

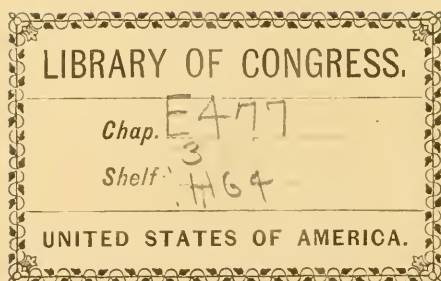
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

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CAMPAIGN
IN THE
SHENANDOAH VALLEY.
1864.

HILL.





Campaign in the Shenandoah Valley, 1864.

A PAPER

READ BEFORE THE

EIGHTH VERMONT VOLUNTEERS

AND

FIRST VERMONT CAVALRY,

At their Annual Re-union,

IN MONTPELIER, VERMONT, NOVEMBER 2, 1886.

BY

COLONEL HERBERT E. HILL

OF BOSTON.

PUBLISHED BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

BOSTON:

RAND AVERY COMPANY, PRINTERS.

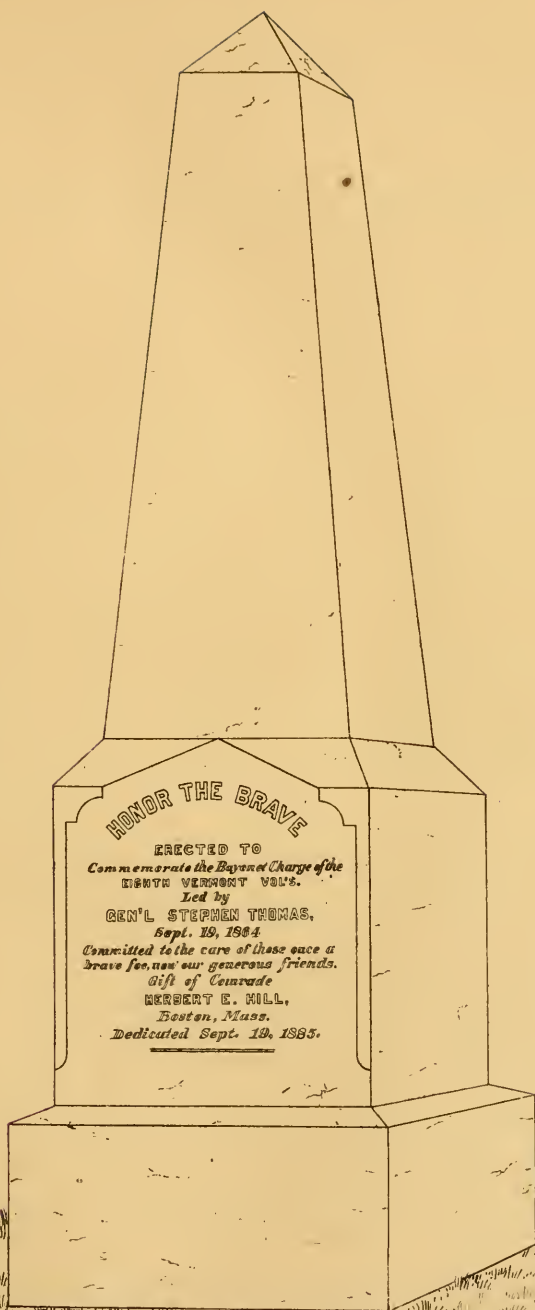
The Franklin Press.

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NOTE.

THIS monument was dedicated with appropriate services by Governor ORMSBEE, Congressman GROUT, General THOMAS, Captain BUFFUM, representatives of the City Government of Winchester, and other distinguished officials. An original poem was read by Colonel GEORGE N. CARPENTER of Boston.

S.O.P. 7/4



HONOR THE BRAVE

ERECTED TO
Commemorate the *Bayonet Charge* of the
NINTH VERMONT VOL.

Led by

GEN'L STEPHEN THOMAS,

Sept. 19, 1864

Committed to the care of those once a
brave foe, now our generous friends.

Gift of Comrade

HERBERT E. HILL,

Boston, Mass.

Dedicated Sept. 19, 1865.

CAMPAIGN IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY, 1864.

THIS campaign was a notable one. No campaign during the four years of bloody war attracted more attention ; none saw fiercer fighting or more decisive results. It was a series of brilliant manœuvres and masterly lightning-strokes. Walled in between two majestic mountains lay the beautiful Shenandoah Valley ; while along its entire length ran a splendid macadamized pike, over which the iron hoofs of war rode rough-shod. The spirit form of romance hovered in splendor in the clouds that shadowed the blue mountain-sides, the beauty of which was heightened by the terrible drama of war.

Here in this wonderful valley the renowned Stonewall Jackson had suddenly appeared with his legions, and, after striking a stinging blow, then as suddenly disappeared.

Through this valley the veteran Lee had swept in resistless fury with his mighty host. Here, and later, the foaming black steed with tremendous speed bore his rider Sheridan down to his army twenty miles away.

It was on the eve of a great presidential election. The giants of war, Grant and Lee, had sent their best troops to contend for this historic highway leading down to Washington. Hence the eyes of the world turned to the Shenandoah Valley and this campaign.

The services of a regiment should not always be computed by its number of engagements. The Second Vermont Brigade at Gettysburg were then comparatively raw troops ; but by striking at the right moment, they won imperishable renown in a single encounter with Pickett's braves.

The Eighth Regiment, or detachments of it, was under fire on

4 *Campaign in the Shenandoah Valley, 1864.*

sixty-two different occasions when men were killed or wounded, and was one of the regiments that were entitled to the name of veteran ; but not of these facts, so much as that which it was permitted to accomplish in one or two great battles, does this paper treat at this time.

High noon, Sept. 19, 1864, found the demon of war playing wild havoc with men's blood and lives, as Sheridan and Early struggled for mastery on the plains of Winchester. Fighting had been going on with more or less severity since daylight, and now the wild shout of Union troops in the woods and beyond signalled that they had penetrated the enemy's lines ; and hope was fluttering gayly from our banners, only to be torn down as the shout died out, and in its place rose the piercing yell of the foe, who had flanked and driven back in dire confusion the left of the Nineteenth and the right of the Sixth Corps. With pride you remember that there the regiment stood like a rock as the defeated and wounded men pressed through to the rear ; how a fragment of the gallant but shattered Fourteenth New Hampshire, one of the first to reach the enemy, was hurled into our midst with their flags, and instantly adopted as a part of our own ; how, in the face of the storm, you advanced into the open field, repulsed the enemy in your front, and held him at bay for over two long hours. All this was well, but the crowning triumph of the regiment came at three o'clock. At that hour the Eighth Vermont and Twelfth Connecticut were far in advance of the rest of the corps, had heard the guns of Upton's gallant men some distance on our left ; but in the disposition of troops all were now withdrawn from our right and immediate left. We were absolutely alone, and mentioned by the historian of the Twenty-ninth Maine as a "skirmish line" with the enemy massed in front.

But now the scene changes ; and Crook's corps, with Thoburn's division nearest us in parallel lines, sweeps up around our right as a turning column in magnificent array. For a moment we forget the horrors of the battle-field, and gaze in silent awe on this mighty chariot of war as it comes nearer and nearer. But the sharp and

almost simultaneous crashes of musketry from Gordon's corps in our front tear frightful gaps in Thoburn's flank ; and his men, without orders, instinctively turn toward the bitter storm of hail, for no troops can long endure such fire. Their beautiful lines are soon lost and gone, merged into a mass of rushing men. The crisis has come. If this charge fails, all is lost. But standing here was a man born for a crisis, a noble soldier, free from envy or jealousy, whose experienced eye at once grasped the situation. Exclaiming, "We'll help them!" he instantly hurled the Eighth Vermont and Twelfth Connecticut with tremendous force upon the enemy in front, shivering their line to atoms, disabling and silencing an aggravating battery, and sending the foe fleeing in disorder toward Winchester. That man was Gen. Stephen Thomas.

This deed of valor was a mighty factor in deciding this great battle, and was of inestimable value to Crook's corps, whose lines, according to Thoburn's own report, were "broken and gone" by the awful flank fire and forced change of front.

Thomas's bayonet charge was the iron prow to Crook's engine of war. It gave force to Crook's assault. It relieved him from the withering flank fire. It broke the enemy's main line of battle in front, resulting in the swift overthrow of Early's entire army. It was like running a rapier into the vitals of the enemy, and holding it there until the Eighth Corps came rushing in on our right, the Sixth on our left, and the Nineteenth in support.

Just here, the key to the battle, and alone on the open plain, with our flag (and that of the Fourteenth New Hampshire we had adopted) flaunting defiance to the frowning batteries and their plunging shot, we were unceremoniously introduced, by the bloody hand of war, to as noble a body of troopers as ever fired a carbine, flashed a gleaming sabre, or buckled on a spur, — none other than that proud command, the First Regiment Vermont Cavalry.

The scene at this moment was one of marvellous grandeur, as the finest cavalry corps on the face of the globe thundered down upon the retreating Confederates.

6 Campaign in the Shenandoah Valley, 1864.

The best soldiers in the world could not stand this combined assault of bayonet and sabre; and the historic city of Winchester, which had stood for years as a blazing citadel between the armies of the country, soon found its streets filled with wild commotion and woe. Thus it was reserved for the gallant Sheridan to win the first decisive victory for the Union arms in this far-famed valley of the Shenandoah.

The Eighth Vermont's bayonet charge, and Crook's assault, were practically one, and were immediately followed by the cavalry charge. As further showing the wild scenes of disorder that followed this break, and to record a fact hitherto unknown to our people, I desire to pay tribute to a deed of lofty heroism performed by a brave woman of the South, the wife of the then battle-scarred veteran Gen. Gordon, now governor of Georgia. In a beautiful letter written on another matter, Mrs. Gen. Gordon adds, —

“I have read with pleasure your patriotic and generous words in presenting the monument to commemorate the courage of your regiment on the 19th September, 1864.

“I followed my husband through the war, and was in Winchester on that memorable day. I shall never forget the appalling spectacle which I that day witnessed, for the *first time*, of Confederates retreating in *disorder*, as I stood in the streets, and with uplifted hands and pleading words vainly tried to turn them back.”

The marvellous endurance and prowess of the Confederate soldiers is solved when we remember they were Americans, and that their wives, mothers, and sisters suffered in common with them, and by their own acts of heroism inspired the men at the front.

A monument marks the pathway of the regiment on this battlefield, and the generous people of Winchester — once our foes, but now our friends — carefully guard it as though their own.

BATTLE OF CEDAR CREEK.

The battle of Cedar Creek stands out like a lone sentinel, totally unlike any other battle of the war. In one brief day the veteran was plunged in the fathomless depths of crushing defeat, and then as suddenly lifted to the dizzy heights of glorious victory. Sheridan had gone to Washington. Wright was in command. Thomas was corps officer of the day. This was the status of affairs on the morning of the battle, Oct. 19, 1864, to which we turn.

The scene was memorable. The chieftain Gordon, after a daring night march, before daybreak lay crouching with three splendid divisions under Wright's left shoulder. Kershaw, with a fourth division, hovered on his left front; while Wharton, with a fifth division, was planted with forty pieces of artillery on Hupp's Hill, above our heads.

The crash of Gordon's rifles in our rear, and the roar of Early's cannon in our front, thundered the appalling fact that we were flanked, and Wright outgeneralled. But be it known to-day, if never before, that this utter lack of precaution was positively inexcusable; for it was our own brigade-commander Thomas, corps officer of the picket, who personally warned the Union commander of the impending danger, and that the enemy was reconnoitring our left, where the blow soon fell with such awful fury. From Col. Hotchkiss it was afterwards learned that this reconnoitring party included himself, Gen. Gordon, and other members of his staff, then selecting their routes for the morning attack.

Assaulted from front and rear, Crook's corps was soon scattered to the winds, and the entire army was threatened with destruction in piecemeal. A swift sacrifice was necessary, and the lot fell upon our own regiment and brigade.

Thomas had been all night in the saddle, with premonition of trouble at daylight; and his hair-breadth escape from the enemy's cavalry that pounced upon him at the picket-line, and his dramatic

ride amid a shower of bullets, closely followed by the foe to the creek, was not less perilous than Putnam's ride of Revolutionary fame. And now under his leadership, deliberately and firmly, in the following order, the Eighth Vermont, Twelfth Connecticut, One Hundred and Sixtieth New York, marched over across the pike, past the flying fragments of Crook's corps, and out toward the awful roar of Gordon's musketry and the piercing yell of his and Kershaw's victorious veterans as they advanced in column of brigades; and the regiment was soon caught in the vortex of four rebel divisions as they closed around us.

My comrades! Who shall attempt to describe that wild tumult of war, that hand-to-hand conflict in the gloom of that fateful October morn, when bayonets actually dripped blood, when skulls were broken by clubbed muskets, and faces burned by the powder's flash? The hand is palsied, and the lips are dumb. It is enough for us to inscribe on the banners we saved, that not until the regiment was surrounded on three sides, not until it was literally crushed by the sheer weight of the enemy's fierce charge, did the regiment give up the ground. The black wings of death dropped over the whirlpool; and from the regiment one hundred and ten men, with thirteen out of sixteen commissioned officers, were killed or wounded, and three color-bearers shot dead, out of a total of one hundred and sixty-four engaged. Our two companion regiments were also crushed. A monument now marks this historic spot.

My comrades, this heroic struggle and costly sacrifice of the Eighth Vermont proved an event of mighty shaping power in this battle: for the Confederate centre was worried and delayed more than a half-hour across the pike; and as the smaller mastiff clings to the throat of the larger in conflict, so the regiment and brigade clung to the throat of the foe as he forced us back toward Meadow Run, to the westward, and away from the pike, the key to the battle-field for the enemy.

A full hour was thereby gained, during which many regiments of the Nineteenth Corps extricated and distinguished themselves. A

Desperate defence of the flag of 8th Vermont.



golden hour was gained, in which the Sixth Corps had time to form, cut loose, and swing entirely clear from the rest of the army on to high ground to the north, fitted by nature for strategy in war, thereby dodging the direct and powerful blow shot out by the right arm of Early's concentrated army; and by this time the fierceness of the first morning charge had died out; the cyclone of the battle had spent itself. It was no longer the magnificent sweep of divisions, with banners high, and wild yells that rent the very air. No: the enemy was moving more cautiously and slowly; and Early now found that the Sixth Corps had had time to take position to arrest his progress, and a cavalry corps hovered on his right flank.

Briefly, some of the important points secured were, —

1st, The golden hour gained to the Sixth Corps, lengthened by the assistance of the Nineteenth Corps regiments as we neared Sheridan's headquarters and Meadow Run, enabled the Sixth Corps to dodge the first blow, and move to high ground.

2d, The long bulldog fight of our brigade and others, from point of attack to Meadow Run, drew the bulk of the enemy from their base and the key of the battle, — the pike.

3d, This long charge and fight of the enemy disjointed his lines, and exhausted his men, compelling a partial change of front, with fagged men, to meet the two comparatively fresh corps now threatening their right flank, — the Sixth Corps and Torbert's cavalry.

Finally, The Sixth Corps, always splendid fighters, now on high vantage-ground, the golden hour granted, had something of an equal show where they could form a regular line of battle, backed by the cavalry corps, — something the Eighth Vermont had not been permitted to enjoy.

Still, notwithstanding all this, two divisions of the Sixth Corps were flanked and roughly handled, and only one division, Getty's, under Gen. L. A. Grant, barely had time to reach a coveted ridge near Middletown in season to prevent the enemy from flanking the entire Sixth Corps; and the student of war may well exclaim, "If the hour of grace granted was scarce sufficient, what would have been the

result but for Thomas's heroic fight at early dawn, and the golden hour thus gained to the army ! ”

Ours was a solitary, isolated combat. And to preserve in permanent, condensed form, references thereto, it is proper to record the fact that seven different historians make special mention of its importance and savage nature ; that Lieut.-Gen. Sheridan stated over his own signature that “ The Eighth Vermont fought with conspicuous gallantry at the battle of Cedar Creek.” Col. Newhall, of Sheridan's staff, wrote : “ The Eighth Vermont did all its work well ; but I think most highly of its services in the morning of the battle of Cedar Creek, when, in the confusion and din, one firm regiment was worth its weight in gold. Your men, standing by the colors, and making that desperate fight with the battle clashing around them, showed as much *morale* as Sheridan did when he came up later, and in the same spirit led on to victory.”

Of eminent Southern men, Major-Gen. Gordon, of Confederate fame, in a recent communication substantiates in the main the statements made herein so far as they relate to the regiment's conflict with his corps, and the results arising therefrom.

Col. Hotchkiss, who served on the staff of Gens. Stonewall Jackson, Early, and Lee, now at Kershaw's side in the assault, gallantly salutes the regiment as follows : “ The losses in killed and wounded that were sustained in this brief shock of battle by your own gallant regiment, and by those associated with it, are the best proof of the fierceness of our attack and the courage and obstinacy of your defence. Such a display of heroic fortitude by the men and by the leader of your command is worthy of the highest praise and admiration. The soldierly honors of the day on your side, the honors that always have been and that always will be awarded to the men that unflinchingly take any odds when duty calls to action, appear beyond question to belong to the brave men of your command. In recognition of their display of such courage, it gives me pleasure to salute them, whether living honored among their comrades, or dead on the field of honorable contest.”

Far distant, however, be the day when the Eighth Vermont fails to accord equal or higher honors to other regiments in this battle. Among those proper to mention here, most cordially do we greet the gallant One Hundred and Fourteenth New York, once of our brigade, which flung itself in front of the foe, and left nearly half its members prostrate and bleeding. Or, again, our brave sister regiment, the Tenth Vermont; for among the deeds of valor none were brighter than when that regiment charged back in the face of the enemy, and rescued an abandoned battery; and the gallant old Vermont brigade did here just what its reputation always guaranteed,—to wit, superb service,—later in a critical hour.

But the scenes in the drama shift. Sheridan suddenly appeared in the midst of his broken regiments. He found his army in weakness: he restored it to power. He found his army disjointed, and presenting simply a division or corps front at a time to the combined assault of the enemy. He quickly changed this unequal mode of warfare, and advanced all the troops to a continuous line, thus uniting the corps. In fact, Sheridan showed consummate generalship here, for he plucked glory from calamity: his crown was Cedar Creek.

And now what shall I say of the colors and the flag of the Eighth Vermont in the afternoon fight and glorious victory? Ah, me! I can see Thomas now as he gathered up his thinned and bleeding ranks, and spurred his horse forward. There was no halting, no wavering. The flag was there; and where Thomas and the flag went, the men would go, even into the gates of death. Will men of the Eighth Vermont ever forget the voice and form of Thomas, and his battle-flag, as the regiment, accompanied by Sheridan, in its wild delirium broke through the battle-scarred veteran brigade of Evans on the enemy's left?

Can any one ever forget the battle shout that rolled along the line as the regiment and brigade, like a wild wave, then swept the enemy's left flank in terrible confusion back upon the centre, amid the incessant crash and roar of artillery and musketry, at

which moment another — and our fourth — color-bearer was shot down?

The enemy's left shivered to fragments, Sheridan's fondest hope to this moment realized, and the battle saved, — was it not Thomas's battle-flag that the affrighted Confederates caught sight of, as he appeared with it like a thunderbolt of war on that high bluff overlooking Middletown, standing between them and the red sinking sun?

Who but Thomas, a mighty avenger of his morning's losses, so suddenly emerged from the woods, and waved high his battle-flag, and in advance of any other banner of the Union army in that battle, — so far, indeed, as to be mistaken at first for the enemy, and fired on by the cannon of our own troops of the Sixth Corps in the rear. I speak the truth: I saw it with my own eyes. It was none other than Thomas's flag, now floating proudly from that naked eminence, which overlooked one of the grandest spectacles it was ever man's lot to look upon; for before our eyes that mighty Confederate host of the morning crumbled, and vanished, as an army, forever from the Shenandoah Valley.

From this point the regiment charged across the meadow, disabled and put to flight two pieces of artillery that had been shelling us with fatal accuracy, and followed the enemy without a moment's rest to Cedar Creek, where here again Sheridan introduced us to one of Custer's finest regiments, the First Vermont Cavalry; and in the marvellous night pursuit that followed, the First and Eighth were the only Vermont regiments that went beyond the creek to Strasburg; and side by side in the darkness and confusion they vied with each other in shouting over captured cannon and the great victory, until midnight found our own regiment well up on the sides of Fisher's Hill, holding the most advanced position of the Union army, directly under the works of the enemy, — so close, indeed, that the men were not allowed to speak above a whisper; while the First Cavalry returned to Cedar Creek with many trophies, and holding as prisoner the brave and wounded Gen. Ramseur.

Campaign in the Shenandoah Valley, 1864. 13

Comrades of the old First Cavalry, the Eighth Vermont salute you ; and it is more than appropriate that the two Vermont regiments, which fought side by side in the final charge at the great battles of Winchester and Cedar Creek, should unite in banquet and re-union to-night at the capital of our State, and rejoice together,—not that we conquered our brothers, but that we held them with us in the family circle of States.

NOTE.

THIS monument, a massive block of marble, was dedicated Sept. 21st, 1885, with impressive ceremonies, in the presence of a large delegation of New-England veterans, prominent Confederates, and many ladies, including Mrs. Governor Ormsbee, Mrs. Newcomb (daughter of General THOMAS), Mrs. Colonel Fred E. Smith, and others.

An oration was delivered by General GROUT, member of Congress from Vermont; also addresses by Governor ORMSBEE, General THOMAS, Colonel MEADE, Captains HOWARD and MCFARLAND.

THE
EIGHTH VERMONT VOLUNTEERS,
GENERAL STEPHEN THOMAS

Commanding the Brigade,

Advanced across the pike on the morning
of October 19, 1864. Engaged the enemy
near and beyond this point, and, before
sunrise, lost in killed and wounded 110
men. Three color-bearers were shot
down, and thirteen out of sixteen com-
missioned officers. Whole number en-
gaged, 164. Dedicated September, 1885.

Gift of Herbert E. Hill, Boston.

CEDAR CREEK MONUMENT.

JOINT RESOLUTIONS

*Unanimously adopted by the Senate and House of Representatives
of Vermont, Nov. 2, 1886.*

WHEREAS, Substantial monuments of Vermont marble have been erected, one upon the battle-field of the Opequan at Winchester, Va., to mark the ground, and as a memorial of those who fell in the bayonet charge of the Eighth Regiment Vermont Volunteers, Sept. 19, 1864; and one at Cedar Creek, in memory of the desperate struggle of Oct. 19, 1864, in which three color-bearers were shot down and a hundred and ten men and thirteen officers, out of a hundred and sixty-four engaged, were killed or wounded; and,

WHEREAS, This noble and generous act was done at the personal expense of Herbert E. Hill, a veteran soldier of the Eighth Vermont Regiment: therefore,

Resolved, by the Senate and House of Representatives, That the patriotic act of Col. Herbert E. Hill (now of Boston), in placing enduring monuments to mark these sacred spots, merits the gratitude of the people of this State, and we hereby tender him the thanks of the General Assembly.

Resolved, That the kindly spirit in which the inhabitants of the Shenandoah Valley received the citizens of this State, Sept. 19, 1885, and aided them in dedicating monuments to their fallen sons, merits our warmest thanks; and the noble response of the Mayor of Winchester, when requested by the Governor of Vermont to protect the monument, saying, "We will guard it sacredly, and rather than allow a single letter to be effaced on its pure white surface, we would wish that it might be extended to the clouds, and that angels of peace might hover around its summit, symbolical of the union of friends now so firmly established between all sections in our land," is received as the fraternal sentiment which binds Vermonters with Virginians.

Resolved, That the Secretary of State furnish copies of the foregoing to Col. Herbert E. Hill and to the Mayor of Winchester, Va.

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